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In regards to HB 5232:

While allowing regulations set by a local historic district to dictate to homeowners what they may and may not do to property they own might at first glance seem unfair, it's important to remember the old quote about the price we all pay for a civilized society. Homeowners in a regulated historic district would have *chosen* to move there. And continuing to live there would be their voluntary decision. They would know the rules of residential renovation, and if they didn't want to follow them, they would be free to leave.

Binding guidelines about what residents may do to their homes are not some fussy set of regulations reserved for dwellers of historic districts, either. Many subdivisions, especially newer ones, have strict rules outlining what residents can and can't do to their houses and yards. When I was growing up, my family built my dad's dream home in a brand new subdivision in Dexter. In that housing development, it was dictated – among other things – what color you could paint your house (mostly limited to a subdued palette of beige and brown), whether or not you could have a fence, and how often you had to mow your lawn. After about a year, my family had gotten pretty tired of those rules, so we sold the house and moved away.

Homeowners come and go, but the houses remain. Their history, though, can be wiped out in one fell swoop. All it takes is one person's historically inaccurate "remodeling," and that building's individuality – a bit of the history of everyone in this community and how it came to be – can never, never be recreated. People who want to live in a contemporary 21st-century-style home don't belong in the historic district. Countless up-to-the-moment houses are there for them to choose from – in other neighborhoods. Let us preserve the handful we have, and let those people look elsewhere for the home of their dreams.

But what about those people who live in and love their historic district, love its atmosphere and heritage, but have always dreamed of having a certain fixture on their homes...beautiful in itself, no doubt, but failing to fit within the district's guidelines?

I'd be sorry they couldn't have what they'd always wanted. But no matter how good their intentions, historic district homeowners have to play by the rules, too. As responsible homeowners, they should know what they are and are not allowed to do. It's up to them to make the decision whether or not the building guidelines outweigh the other benefits of living in this historic neighborhood.

The question of historic districts is bigger than whether to add a porch to a house, or how to renovate its windows. It's larger than a single house, and larger than a historic district. It has to do with being an upstanding citizen and looking out for the entire community –

looking decades in advance when most people are looking to the renovations they can do in the next season, year, five years, ten years.

If Michigan's historic districts are allowed to become a hodgepodge of styles plucked willy-nilly at the whims of their passing owners, over time they will deteriorate and become less of a historic collection and more like any other neighborhood in Suburbia, USA. The historical value will decrease. The property value of the neighborhood, and surrounding neighborhoods, and the downtown district, will decrease. And across our state, individuality and small-town charm will perish.

For the good of our communities, both economically and culturally, historic districts must continue to be accurately, meticulous, conscientiously preserved. I protest HB 5232, and ask our lawmakers to vote NO.

Respectfully submitted,  
Maria Taylor